
A Worldview Scripture Use Workshop¹

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How does one get thirty-two people from seven Philippine language groups and fifteen church traditions to “understand their own worldview, to recognize the beliefs and assumptions which drive their worldview, and to appreciate their good cultural values and practices” (Worldview–Scripture Use Workshop Proposal, 2002)? How well could nine staff members from four organizations and four different nationalities facilitate these goals? A sceptic would answer that it is an impossible task. Perhaps, but it didn’t keep us from trying in 2002.

Keith Benn set out to organize a workshop that would allow the participants to work out real-life problems found in their cultures. Using Paul Hiebert’s enculturation (or critical contextualization) model, the workshop participants were asked to “do their own work.” According to Keith’s philosophy of Scripture Use, people have to evaluate their own culture in light of biblical truth:

Scripture Use is a process by which people evaluate their current worldview in the light of God’s Word, examining and refining their assumptions about God and the universe, reviewing their beliefs and revising them according to the scriptural standard, rethinking and, if necessary, revising their cultural values in the light of God’s Word and transforming their behavior to reflect their new relationship with God and society. (Benn, “A Philosophy of Scripture Use,” unpublished paper, 2002).

Using this “people first” approach meant that the staff would spend much less time “telling,” and the participants would be very much involved in their own “discovering.” Moving away from a lecture-centric format, the staff struggled to figure out how to best present the necessary materials. The four weeks of the workshop were a journey of discovery for the staff and mentors alike as they tried to make this work. At the end of the process, it was easier to see how we arrived at conclusions for covering the various topics. It wasn’t so easy at the beginning.

¹ This article is a revision of: Stallsmith, Glenn. 2003. “A Report of the Worldview–Scripture Use Workshop.” *Scripture in Use Today* 6:24-27.

Teaching methods

“The changes necessary for worldview transformation can only be undertaken in culturally appropriate ways if the Christian community itself is in charge of the change process. The outside change agent is a motivator and facilitator, not a key player in the change cycle.” Keith Benn

The teaching style we used consisted primarily of four stages:

- 1) an explanation of the material to the mentors at the previous day's mentors' meeting (along with all the written material to be distributed to the participants),
- 2) a short initial presentation of the material,
- 3) ample time for each ethnic group to discuss written questions and issues, and
- 4) a plenary discussion with reporting (or follow-up time) by each group of participants.

We believe that the strengths of this format are:

- Mentors have almost twenty-four hours to digest the teaching material and translate it, if necessary.
- The participants don't fall asleep during long lectures. (One man said, “This is the first workshop where we haven't fallen asleep.”)
- Each presentation includes detailed discussion questions and adequate biblical references, challenging the participants to discover the answers for themselves.
- It is conducive to reading the Scriptures (when available) and processing the information in one's own language.
- The reporting time encourages the participants to crystallize their findings and present them to the plenary session.
- The leeway given for participants to express their own views—even if unorthodox—allows for healthy debate and dialogue.

Here are some of the factors that the staff discovered in conducting the plenary sessions:

- Are the participants more likely to report what they learned or what they think the staff want to hear? We were assured several times by national staff members and mentors that this was not happening here. It is important that the workshop atmosphere encourages open sharing and dialogue.
- Reporting times require skilled staff moderators to run the feedback sessions. They must be sensitive to the culture and gentle in correction. They must be good listeners (especially when listening to a weak speaker or translator) and quick thinkers. Reacting to

another's thoughts requires the leader to be very prepared and knowledgeable of the subject matter.

- Participants and staff alike felt pressured when only thirty minutes was allowed for reporting during the plenary session. When forty-five to sixty minutes was allowed, reporting and interaction were more likely to be vigorous and satisfying.

Results

What did we accomplish at this workshop? This is a difficult—perhaps impossible—question to answer at the completion of the workshop. It will take months to assess the impact of the time we spent together. However, there are some things that are evident outcomes.

First, there were changes of attitudes, which covered several areas. Some people said they were more committed to ministering and producing materials in their mother tongues. One woman shared with me during a break time: “I never realized before how important it is to sing and read the Bible in my own language. Before, I thought Ilocano or English were OK. Now I would like to help [the local translator] with her work.” This woman is the pastor of a group of about eighty churches. She has asked for a Worldview Scripture Use workshop for her churches.

A few people testified to changes they were challenged to make in their own lives. One woman stood up and said, “I have realized that I am a syncretist.” She proceeded to tell about a time in her life when she made a sacrifice to the spirits, asking them to heal her son’s sickness. After the hospital treatment failed, she gave in to family pressure for the sacrifice. Her resolution was, “I want to change my family’s thinking before I die.”

On the first day, one of the participants asked, “When are you going to give us the answers?” Apparently many of the groups had the impression that the solutions to all their enculturation problems lay with us staff. It took several days to help them understand that there are no black-and-white answers to these issues and that they themselves were responsible for discovering culturally appropriate ways to enculturate.

Second, we witnessed the production of new media. Dozens of new songs and four Bible dramas were written and recorded. As an ethnomusicologist, I was impressed with how quickly the people produced songs. I was invited to give a short presentation (according to the teaching format of the workshop) about writing new songs. I am not even sure this was necessary because each group seemed ready to write new songs immediately. We started listening to new songs the day after my presentation. Having a theme to concentrate on—in this case, death—was very helpful in focusing the participants’ thoughts. In many song-writing workshops the presenter concentrates on “how to write songs” and the themes of the songs are secondary. In other words, the message is: “I’ll teach you about song composition, now you must find something to write about.” Perhaps the focus should instead be on: “Write a song about this subject you have been studying for the last two weeks.” The participants’ heads were full of ideas and Scripture verses about death rituals and the beliefs behind them. The new songs were a natural way to express their thoughts and discoveries.

Third, the synergy produced within the workshop had to be seen to be believed. An excellent example occurred during the last week when we studied “Dreams—Where do they come from?” Initially some teams seemed to say they had few dreams. But as each language wrote on the blackboard the dreams their people had, other language groups began to say, “Yes, we also have those dreams!” Similarly, in studying the death rituals, the more each team shared, the more other teams discovered and learned about their own death rituals. Thus synergy spurred enculturation, which in turn stimulated Scripture use.